ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0033] A method and apparatus for encapsulating long messages over limited Fibre Channel ELSs. The method includes ascertaining if the authentication message has a length that exceeds the message length supported by the device with which communication is sought, and either: fragmenting the authentication message into message fragments if the length of the message exceeds the message length supported by that particular device and sequentially sending the message fragments one by one; or sending the authentication message in its entirety if the length of the authentication message is less than the message length supported by that particular device. When the message is fragmented, a fragmentation bit in the message fragment is set except for the last message fragment. The set fragmentation bit indicates that subsequent fragments are to be sent. The fragmentation bit of the last fragment is reset to indicate that it is the last fragment in the authentication message. This fragmentation method enables initiating and target entities implementing a limited form of ELSs to send long authentication messages to one another in a Fibre Channel Switching Fabric.